

State Normal School of Colorado

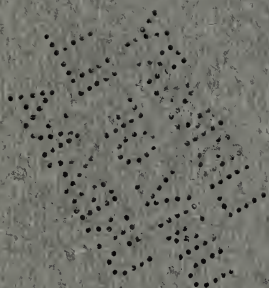


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First Term Senior English.

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Generalized history of literature from the evolutionary view point, with special reference to (1) the phases of early literary expression most valuable in the teaching of children, (2) the broader significance of the great forms of literature.

LESSON TWO: SYLLABUS.

II. Outline of the larger phases of expression before the complete dominance of individual artistry. (See I, earlier syllabus.)

These modes to be figured as wide general regions through which the stream of expression is borne, the various forms of literature (here used as a term signifying emotional and imaginative expression in language, oral or written) being represented by currents of the stream which are again lost in the general flow, or which acquire new characters as they pass through the locks that divide one level from another.

A. The period of communal expression.

1. The conditions of such expression.

- a. The smallness and homogeneity of the horde.
- b. The sameness of the life-problem for all.
- c. The vital and practical origin of the emotion

expressed.

2. The nature of communal emotion.

- a. As generated in the horde.
- b. As expressed by the horde without separable individual consciousness.

3. The typical form of the communal period: the festal dance.

Rhythm which is the seed and life of life
And of all art the root and branch and bloom.

—Richard Watson Gilder.

a. Sources of our knowledge of the primitive dance: travelers' observation and study of the dances of the Australians, Mincopies, Andaman Islanders, Bushmen, Fuegians, Botocudos, and other tribes; comparison of these dances with what is known of the development of the choral dance among the "classic" peoples; interpretation of the data by comparison with other anthropological facts.

b. General character of the dance: the most complete expressional agent, involving the whole body and arousing the highest degree of reciprocal excitement; difference from the modern dance in purpose, content, and influence—source in fundamental practical needs, (food, destruction of enemies, etc.) effect in profound social changes.

c. Classes: gymnastic, mimetic; probability that the former were originally mimetic.

d. Occasions and content: present interests of the horde as a whole—the hunt, war, the seasons, incidents among men and animals, conceptions of a life after death (in at least one observed case; Cf. the Dionysiac festivals).

e. Reasons why the primitive dance should be accounted the first step in literary evolution: rhythm a formative agent; the movements accompanied by song; presence of lyric, epic, and dramatic elements; the mimetic dance of love and war leading to the folk drama; the tendency of the dance to become autotelic. Thus

the general content of the dance (sense of kind, sympathy), its subjective effects (emotional intoxication with deliverance from the merely personal—the *katharsis* of Aristotle), its essential form-element (rhythm), and its law of development (from practical to autotelic) so many bonds of connection between the earliest “literary” expression of the savage horde and the greatest work of the individual poet.

f. Features of the dance which, originally practical, become autotelic: scene chosen, dress, rhythm, instruments, choruses, dramatic representation.

g. Sources of pleasure in the dance which help to develop its autotelic tendency: the lively satisfaction of vigorous and rapid motion; the natural relief of giving vent to inward pressure of feeling (Cf. Yrjo Hirn’s view of the primary art impulse as that of externalizing a mood to enhance its pleasure, or to relieve the pain of inhibition); the organic delight in rhythm; gratification of the propensity to imitate (sometimes developing into an independent passion); increased sympathy—the sense of kind; in some religious dances, the satisfaction of union with the tribal god; the *katharsis* (beneficent cleansing and freeing of the mind from turbulent and unrecconciled passions) which Aristotle declared to be the highest function of tragedy.

h. Social value.

(1). The primitive dance the probable gateway of tribal organization, because capable of arousing the emotion of kinship and common consent necessary to fuse into dynamic force the practical reasons for union.

(2). The dance in its early development a continuous moral force: the individual savage brutish, stolid, idiotic, fitful; the horde through festal consent a social body capable of the beginnings of civilization, poetry, religion.

(3). The dance the conjectural gateway also of sentential speech: strong feeling about a more clearly realized situation the possible agent in shaking free the beginnings of syntax from the mere emotional cadence and repetition of the communal cry.

(4). The dance influential through sexual selection in improving the tribe.

(5). The dance the beginning of a social agency of exhaustless force—the art impulse: the “waking vision” of primitive communal emotion the preliminary stage of artistic power; the “spontaneous play of fancies and images suggesting and following one another in the confusion of a dream,” the stuff on which thought and effort seize in the beginning of artistic activity.

B. Pedagogical deductions from the communal dance, applicable to the literature work of the lower grades.

1. Need of abundant bodily movement brought into fruitful relation with the imaginative and emotional interests of the children; marching, dancing, gymnastics, not as detached exercises, but as agents in expressing some meaning.

2. Better use of the instinct to “act out”: dramatizing the life of birds and other creatures, incidents in school, home, and playground, especially significant

features of the stories presented to the children or read by them; unifying, through a "play" constructed by the children in the regular composition work, the meaning of an entire course.

3. Desirability of a revival of the festival in school life (a) to unite the different groups of a school body (b) to promote delight in the out-of-door world (when the character of the festival permits) (c) to raise selected experiences, grave or joyous, to higher levels of intensity and hence to more potent influence (d) to accustom the children to work in accordance with a true principle of art, that of producing in the spectators the thoughts and emotions of the performers.

The undertaking of such festivals only as shall grow out of and unify the work of the pupils, and of only such number each year (say two or three) as will leave room for quiet growth between.

Readings.

Gummere: The Beginnings of Poetry (The best treatment of the communal dance from the literary standpoint).

Grosse: The Beginnings of Art (Excellent for a digest of the facts).

Posnett: Comparative Literature.

Matthews: The Development of the Drama.

Chapters on the origin of the drama in the histories of national literature—Greek, Spanish, German, French.

Chapters or paragraphs in books on anthropology and in travelers' tales of primitive peoples (For facts—

sometimes inaccurate. and interpretations—not infrequently misleading).

A lesson in the association of work and play (Peter W. Dykema) *The Craftsman*, September, 1907.

The *Journal of Folk-Lore*, histories, books on early customs (for old forms of celebrating festivals) and current articles for revivals and rearrangements of carols, masques, processions, plays, and bits of ancient or primitive ritual.

Required Work.

The presentation in careful and detailed outline of a plan suitable for celebrating Harvest Home or Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Patriots' Day (February, because of the birthday of Washington and of Lincoln), May Day, or Arbor Day.

Suggestive Questions for Preparation.

1. What do you understand by the statement that early poetry was communal?
2. Can the conditions that made communal production possible be repeated in the modern world? In the child's world?
3. Which of the great forms of art literature lies farthest from communal beginnings?
4. What is the difference between the terms *communal* and *universal* as applied to literature?
5. What definite traces of the communal period are found in the *Iliad*? In the Bible?

6. Literature moves from the practical to the autotelic. Explain this statement.

7. Name three characteristics of primitive, communal "literature" that have persisted in the greatest art literature.

8. Has the fact that primitive literature was communal any significance for teaching children?

9. Do you approve of concert recitation of poetry? Under what conditions?

10. What is the value of 'dramatizing' a story?

11. What is Yrjo Hirns' theory about the beginning of the "inner process" in poetry? (See I, c, (1), (a) and II, A, 3, g.) Does this theory offer any suggestion about teaching oral and written composition?

12. What is the difference between presenting a play and making a true festival?

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